“Sweet Mist, Melted Memories”

A Travel Memoir Set in Ooty

by Bartika Biswas

Some places are remembered by their views; some by their fragrance.
Ooty, for me, will always stay like the sweetest aroma of melting chocolates.

Chocolates — this one word becomes unknowingly attached to all of our early childhood days. It reminds us of how we try to find even a small piece of chocolate despite thousands of scoldings from elders. Small childhood memories but unforgettable ones, right?

And then, imagine that chocolate-loving kid inside a chocolate factory. You see chocolates melting everywhere around you. You smell it but don’t know which one to taste and your soul wants all. This is what happened to me while I visited the mist-kissed hills of Ooty with a heart full of quiet anticipation. Now, let us dig deeper into the poetry that Ooty surprisingly gifted me.

It was November. In that year, the cool breeze of the beginning of winter brought a special message to me. In a sudden plan, my mother and I reached Ooty, carrying a small suitcase and a heart eager for wonder. Believe me, the journey to Ooty was so so mesmerising! Now…, if I close my eyes, do you know what paint gets visible first?

It is how the Nilgiris welcomed me. The beauty of the mist-wrapped hills, the toy trains, the lush green mighty trees— everything enlivened my tired soul. Even, words won’t be enough to describe that beauty. Honestly, on that day I felt to be so lucky to have my eyesight. It seemed as if it made my soul so colourful like an everlasting lens creating its favourite album.

It was somewhere around 8 a.m. in the morning. Suddenly, it started knocking me like an unfinished poem, with a cup of chia and a plate of Maggie. The surrounding roads wrapped themselves around

me in mist before I even understood where I was. It was my journey towards Dodabetta. I have read this name several times in geography books. But, that time I was going to touch it.

To witness the beauty.
To absorb its elegance.

We were moving through eucalyptus groves and deep green slopes. The road curved like a ribbon through emerald forests. There, I felt as if each bend revealed a new shade of blue in the distant hills. The journey itself had already become one of my most favourite adventures. And then, I suddenly noticed a signboard.

“Welcome to the highest peak of the Niligiris.”, it was written there in bold blue letters.

Honestly, till then the road to Doddabetta was not just a journey upward. It felt like a journey inward. Every curve seemed like a question mark. Every turn, an invitation. Thereafter, from the viewpoint, I felt as if the world stretched so endlessly. Layers of green folding into one another like the unfinished stanzas. I stood there longer than necessary. Not because the view demanded it. But because something inside me did. Perhaps, “travel”, I was beginning to understand, “is not about seeing more. Rather, it is about feeling more.”

Suddenly, I started feeling something so strange in the air. As if the air was scented faintly with not just eucalyptus but something sweeter. The next minute, it reminded me of that 5-year-old me. I felt like, “The rich aroma of cocoa filled the air, wrapping around me like a warm embrace.” It was impossible not to smile. I wondered how the younger me always waited for her mother to gift her chocolates on Saturdays. Therefore, watching chocolate being made felt like witnessing joy take physical form. My mother and I couldn’t help but bring ample chocolate boxes for our close ones.

Nearby, there was also a tea factory. It offered another stanza to that unfinished poetry. The fresh tea leaves smelled too earthy and strong. I was enamoured. Perhaps, I thought, “How something so simple can hold so much depth.” Now, how can I forget that one cup of local chia that I had tried there?

No, I cannot.

It was the most refreshing chia, I ever had. So flavourful, so refreshing. Watching leaves transform into a cup made me learn the true value of time, heat, and patience. Then, I asked a local, “How does it feel to work here every day?” She smiled at me and said, “Nice!” Her sweet gesture brought a flood of happiness in my heart and I smiled back at her.

Thereafter from there, we made our way to the Ooty Botanical Garden. Entering there, I felt like a paradise for every nature lover. Walking through the unknown mighty trees felt like stepping into the most beautiful world. I suddenly felt as if every tree had thousands of stories to tell. Since childhood, I had never seen such an incredible variety of plants. From giant ancient trees to countless species of unknown flowers and spices — they added their own fragrance and charm to the landscape. Then, I suddenly noticed a beautifully maintained greenhouse. It was filled with vibrant blooms and rare plants. We truly felt a delight to explore that. Meanwhile, it seemed as if the sprawling garden invited us to slow down and simply admire nature’s quiet artistry. So, my mother and I wandered through its winding paths with childlike wonder. Our smiles knew no bounds. Now, I feel like, perhaps it was one of those rare moments and together we embraced every second of it.

So gentle.

So precious to bloom in our hearts forever.

By that afternoon, one of the hotel staff suggested, “You can also visit the nearby Rose Garden.” So, we decided to have a short ride towards that. Within 30 minutes or so, I found myself walking through the blooming poetry of the Government Rose Garden. It was the beginning of winter. So, there were only a few flowers. Perhaps, it was the first time, I witnessed so many different shades— crimson, ivory, peach, yellow, and gold. The younger me inside was so happy. As if the five-year-old me smiled and said inside, “Thank you!”

Walking around the garden, I felt like each one of them carried their own personalities. It was nothing less than strolling through a living painting. Often, I had heard a famous quote, “Beauty thrives in variation.” To me, that garden did not just display flowers. It truly celebrated the bountiful diversity. As the sun set in the blue skies, Ooty started growing colder. But, my heart felt warmer. Perhaps, my heart received a gentle sense of fulfilment and thus ended my first day in this tiny hill station at the lap of the Nilgiris.

With a blend of thrill, sweetness, and serenity.

It was 8 o’clock the next morning. Honestly, after such a peaceful sleep in that cold weather, my mind hardly wanted to leave the warmth of the blanket. But, my head convinced something else. So, I followed its instructions to get ready for the day.

It was a bright sunny day with nature in its freer form. By my watch, it was somewhere around 9 a.m.. Then, we all enjoyed our breakfasts at a round table. It felt so enjoyable together. Thereafter, we started our journey to Pykara. There, some locals suggested to us, “Here is a small waterfall. Trek to the fall. It is amazing.” Honestly, their sparkling eyes were enough to convince us. We had a short trek to the cascading beauty of Pykara Falls. The path was so simple yet invigorating! With each step, the sound of rushing water grew louder. It started building a silent anticipation like a drumroll. And then, I finally saw it.

White water tumbling down dark rocks, fearless and alive.

How can I forget to add the lush green landscape there! The only words screamed inside, “Nature, you are truly the best creator!” Watching it, I felt a quiet lesson unfold within me. Perhaps, it softly said, “Move forward, even if the path is steep.”

There was also a lake nearby. Some of us wanted to go boating there. And I, being the most adventurous soul there, was already ready for it. Standing far behind, the lake truly looked like a mirror. It gracefully reflected the sky and the surrounding greenery. I had also heard a few locals sharing many stories about the lake. So, from the very first minute, I was truly excited. As the boat moved slowly across the calm water, the cool breeze touched my face and I felt a deep sense of freedom. Honestly, I didn’t make out how that twenty-minute boat ride ended so quickly. But, it turned out to be one of the highlights of the day. There were dense forests on both sides. I heard some locals speaking, “Often, tigers come to drink water from this lake.”

Now, imagine yourself on such a ride, where you spotted so many wild animals. No network, no human beings except us! Just a small line between the blue sky and water. It was so thrilling, yet something worthy to craft with my pen.

Thereafter, we had much time left for that day. So, we decided to visit the nearby Shooting Point. I had heard that many South-Indian films were filmed there. It was at the top of the hills, surrounded by dense pine forests on both sides. Surprisingly, walking through the tall, straight pine trees felt like stepping into a different world. Inside I felt, "How elegant Mother Nature can be as a painter to paint such a beautiful portrait!" The sunlight filtered through the branches. It created strange patterns on the ground. I stood there for a few minutes, gazing at the quiet elegance of nature. Slowly, I started realising something deeper. It felt as if, behind such a beautiful view, time silently instructed us to think, to breathe, and to reconnect with ourselves.

It was somewhere around five. The golden sun slowly began to set behind the misty hills of Ooty. So, we decided to begin our journey toward Mysore, the place of Royalties.

NH 181 — We chose that forest road, passing through Mudumalai and Bandipur National Parks. Honestly, the winding roads of the Nilgiris, lined with dense forests and fading golden light, made me feel both peaceful and emotional. Meanwhile, I looked out of the window quietly. I was enamoured of the quiet and mysterious road, surrounded by lush green forests on both sides. It was my first time travelling inside such a dense national park. Every turn felt so thrilling there. As if the forest itself was watching us pass through. Suddenly, we spotted a few deer grazing calmly near the roadside. Their gentle presence made the moment feel almost unreal. Then, a little further ahead, I spotted a majestic elephant walking silently among the trees. I also found a peacock crossing the road with graceful confidence.

None of us spoke for a while. It seemed as if we were simply absorbing the magic of that wild landscape. Some of us, including me also tried to capture the moments as stills in our cameras. Now, those clicks are shining like priceless gems in our gallerias. As the forest slowly faded behind us, the road opened toward the City of Sandalwood and Silk. Soon, the evening started deepening into the night and I felt a single thought lingering in my heart . It quietly whispered,
"The unfinished poem perhaps finds its parting gifts. Perhaps, every whispering valley, every drifting cloud, and every emerald slope felt like the hills' last blessing before the curtains rose on the royal elegance of Mysore…"

Fig. 1. *The Misty Road Towards Ooty*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 2. *On Top of the Nilgiris*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 3. *Traditional Preparation of Eucalyptus Oil*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 4. *The Art of Tea Preparation*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 5. *Chocolate in the Making*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 6. *A Wildflower in Bloom*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 7. *Shades of Roses*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 8. *A Taste of Tradition*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

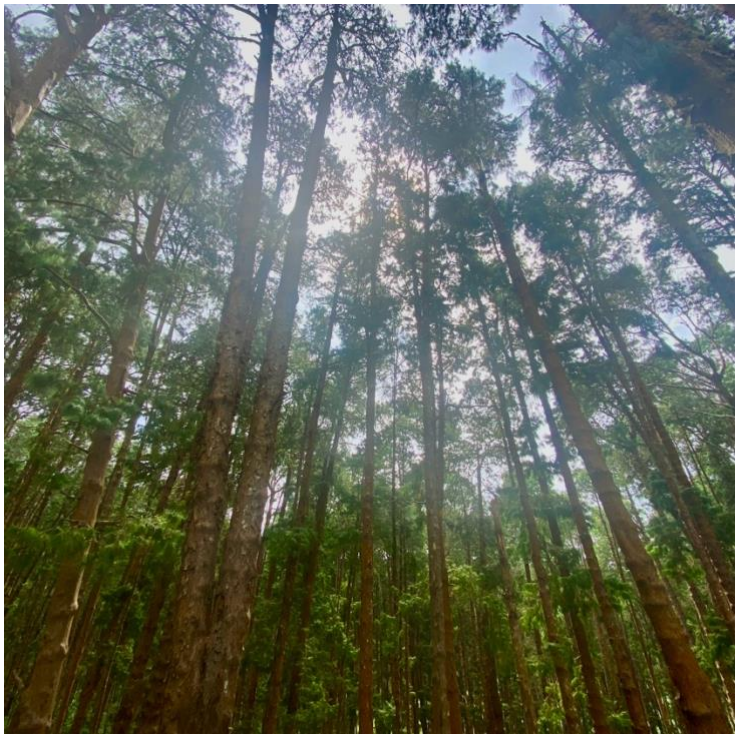

Fig. 9. *Guardians of the Nilgiris*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 10. *The Beauty of Pykara*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 11. *Pykara Lake*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 12. *Beauty Beyond Words*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 13. *Into the Wild*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 14. *Nature's Gentle Wanderers*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 15. *The Gentle Giant*. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.

Fig. 16. Nature’s Royal Dancer. Photograph by Bartika Biswas.